

Thank you for giving the residents of Hardwick and Montague an opportunity to comment on MBI's attempts to help provide internet coverage to unserved areas.

As a 25+ year resident of Hardwick with 23 years at my current location on North Road, I have experienced both the positives and negatives associated with living in small rural town. Chief among the negatives is being forced to accept inferior wired phone, cellular phone, electrical and internet service while also paying full price for these services. My landline often doesn't work when it rains and Verizon has no immediate plans to replace the 40-50 year old lines whose many cracks permit water to seep in and distort or completely shut down phone communication. I'd get rid of my land line but for the fact that cellular mobile service is also unreliable given the many dead zones in town and our distance from current cell towers. Verizon technician's have offered a wide variety of explanations for our poor landline service ranging from the age of the lines, "we're the last house in the 413 area" [Barre, 206 feet away is 978] to "hunter's shoot out the lines." Thus I pay full price for two kinds of unreliable and inferior phone service with no resolution to these problems on the horizon.

We burn through light bulbs and electrical appliances far faster than normal due to inconsistent oscillation of electricity in the region's grid. National Grid has been made aware of these issues and alternately denies they exist or make excuses for them by stating that this occurs because we are so far away from the nearest electrical transfer station in Gilbertville. National Grid also has no immediate plans to replace aging electrical lines in this area and, as was demonstrated by sometime's week long power outages after ice, snow, and wind storms, neglected tree trimming and other maintenance for years in order to maximize profits.

My job as a high school social teacher demands and requires access to reliable and preferably high speed internet. When the internet initially became available circa 2000 the state subsidized dial up connections for teachers. That subsidy ended yet I am still expected to have internet service in order to communicate with students, parents and the school itself not to mention lesson planning. This is yet another example of the passing on what should be publicly funded to private consumers. Our options for internet connectivity currently include dial-up access, satellite access, or cellular based portable wifi. As you are well aware dial up access does is too slow to be practical. Banking, doing taxes, and streaming are incompatible with dial up. We tried cellular based wifi but we were too far from a tower to get reliable service. We have used satellite for the past few years but it is expensive for the quality and quantity of data.

Regarding the current proposals for MBI to consider disbursing funds to Comcast or Matrix to hook up unserved households in Hardwick, I have to say that Comcast has not shown any serious previous interest in expanding into unserved areas of town. They have been the only show in town and have used that position to maintain the status quo. Hooking up 1.5 miles over a five year period hardly constitutes as serious effort. The fact that they have never attended a town broad band meeting nor presented any concrete plans mapping out where and when they will expand service leaves me with little faith that they will actually follow through with any expansion plan in a substantive and timely manner. Quite frankly all I heard last night were platitudes and promises.

While I understand MBI's desire to use tax payers funds in the most efficient manner and MBI's reluctance to subsidize a private potential competitor to Comcast which already serves 80% of town, it was the very threat of competition that caused Comcast to come to the table. Had the town's Broad band commission not been forced, out of frustration, to look for alternatives due to Comcast's disinterest in making real effort to connect more homes in Hardwick, we would not even be in this situation. Based on my experience with old

infrastructure and technology and dealing with well funded and deep pocketed corporation like Verizon and Nationall Grid Comcast's proposal to use coaxial copper cable represents dated technology that, once laid or strung-up, will not be replaced for a half-century or more dooming Hardwick to a slow but sure economic decline and its children to second rate educational opportunities.

I am also conceded that Comcast chose to redact information in its proposal. Unless there is real national security issue that required them to withhold information, any redaction suggests they have something to hide. Transparency always creates greater public and consumer confidence. Comcast is not being forthright by redacting information. Comcast's contempt for the townspeople of both Montague and Hardwick was evident by their representative's deliberate decision to address the panel with his back turned to the public. Had the public not demanded that he turn around he would have continued addressing the public in that manner. This was was other example of Comcast's renown reputation for abysmal customer service. Perhaps its time to try something different.

Finally, the fact that a large number of Hardwick residents agreed to pay an upfront \$500 connection cost, reveals their frustration with the current situation and their willingness to go in a different direction because they have no confidence that Comcast will live up to any promises it makes. Please listen to our voices. We are tired of waiting for what we know our town needs to create a sustainable and vibrant future.

Sincerely,

Jochen Welsch
P.O. Box 242
1791 North Road
Hardwick, Ma 01037
413 477 8358

I will be sending a copy of this email to Senator Gobi's office as well.